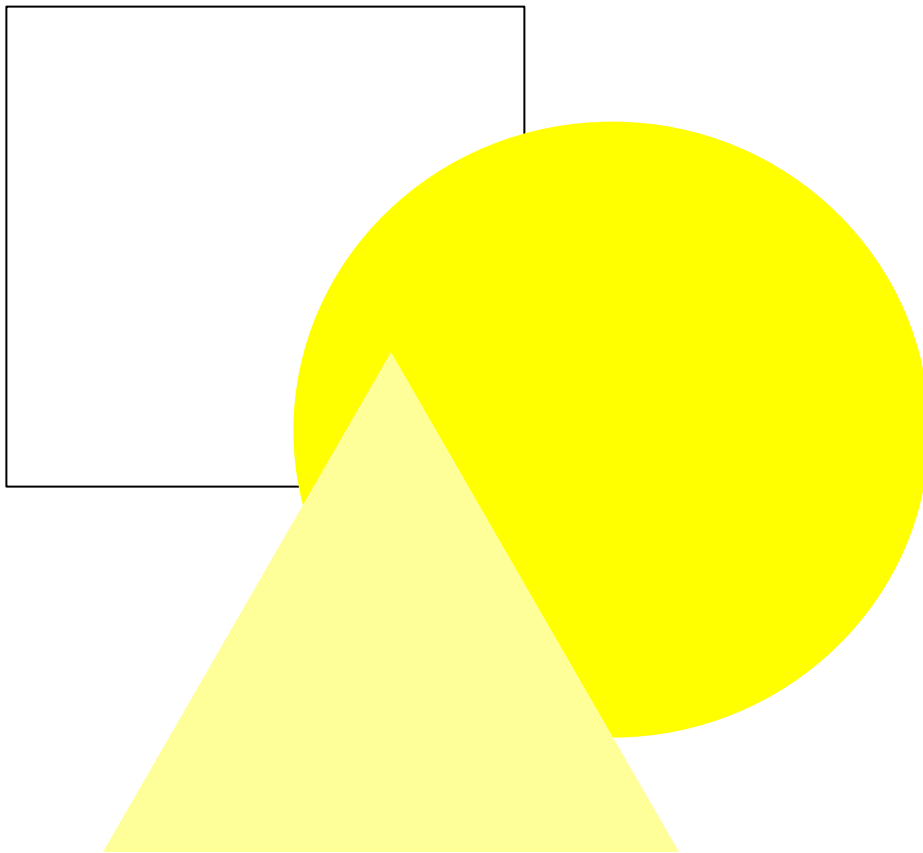


# **A Guide to Plan Stewardship for Citizen Plan Stewards**

Suggestions from the Seattle Planning Commission



# Introduction

## **What does it mean to “steward” neighborhood plans?**

Plan stewardship is the way the neighborhood provides ongoing organization and focus within the community for carrying out its neighborhood plan priorities. It is how the neighborhood manages the implementation of specific projects. Plan stewardship also involves further refinement of the plan and periodic assessment of accomplishments as well as emerging needs. Stewardship should be a cooperative effort between the neighborhoods and the City, with each having important roles to play over the years.

## **Why is stewardship important to neighborhood planners now?**

Stewardship represents an opportunity to build a stronger community by getting things done at a neighborhood level. This is also an important opportunity to keep the spirit of the neighborhood plans alive for elected decision-makers and for the city as a whole. Most neighborhoods have made their own commitments to initiate specific actions and projects as part of their plans. The City has also made a tangible commitment to helping neighborhoods implement their plans by providing specific funding, access to ongoing funding sources (such as the Neighborhood Matching Fund), and access to City staff.

## **Why is a Guide to Plan Stewardship needed?**

Some neighborhoods created stewardship groups that are already underway. Others are just beginning to develop this capacity. Many neighborhoods are asking for assistance in creating and maintaining the ability to steward their neighborhood plan.

This guide presents ideas to help citizens develop and maintain an effective mechanism for implementing their plans. Beginning with a discussion about stewardship responsibilities, the guide outlines *seven basic elements* to consider in developing implementation and oversight strategies.

# Key Expectations

Resolution 30011, passed by the City Council in September 1999, outlined the responsibilities that are related to plan implementation. These responsibilities pertain to both neighborhood plan stewards and to the City. Following is a summary of these expectations as expressed by the Department of Neighborhoods.

## **What can you expect from the City if you engage as a steward of our neighborhood plan?**

- Advice about how to get or stay organized and how to continue outreach efforts.
- Help refining the plan's broader vision into specific projects ready for implementation.
- Access to training to continue your group's capacity-building as needed.
- Clarity about whom to go to with questions about implementation.
- Help making connections with appropriate City staff on specific projects.
- Regular meetings with sector managers to discuss plan implementation.
- Guidance, as requested, about how to organize specific implementation projects.
- Help prioritizing projects when funding is limited.
- Regular reports on how implementation is progressing.

## **What does the City expect from people engaged in stewardship of their plans?**

- Active members who remain engaged in their plan's original goals and strategies.
- Willingness to help plan and participate in sector-wide events.
- Attendance at meetings with the sector managers to discuss and work on implementation issues.
- Willingness to take responsibility for managing implementation projects.
- Willingness to work on plan updates and additions--with community buy-in--to respond to changing conditions and new opportunities.
- Ongoing outreach to other community members to increase awareness and project participation.
- Help getting representative community feedback on projects the City is considering.
- Feedback on the City's performance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From "Stewarding the Neighborhood Plans," City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, October 1999.

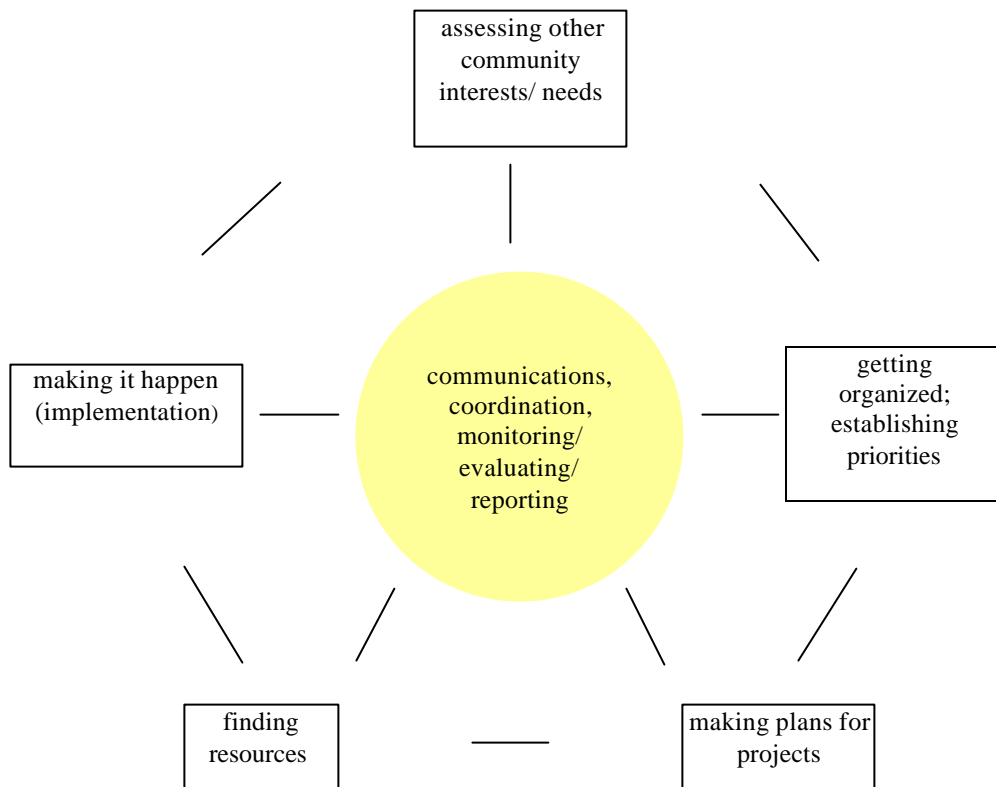
# The Role of the Citizen Plan Steward in the Community

Neighborhood Plan Stewardship involves two levels of Activity:

- **Taking action** in implementing specific projects.
- **Providing oversight** of the neighborhood plan's goals and the City's Comprehensive Plan's goals.

While many people are interested in specific aspects of the plan, neighborhood plan stewardship groups must provide overall leadership in advocating for, promoting, and monitoring implementation of the plan. They must keep focused on the big picture while working to move individual projects forward. Neighborhood Plan stewardship groups will be responsible for tracking the accomplishments of the plan, periodically assessing the need for adjustments in the plan's strategies and actions in order to reflect changing needs and trends. Last but not least, stewardship groups will be responsible for implementing specific plan projects.

The following chart illustrates the key ingredients of plan stewardship and implementation. In the circle are essential elements for a stewardship process. Actions in the boxes illustrate the strategies needed to implementing the plan itself.



# **Elements of Effective Plan Stewardship for Neighborhoods**

Each neighborhood has its own rich tapestry of character, goals and challenges, planning history, community resources, and relationships between people within and outside the neighborhood. Within this context, however, each neighborhood faces similar challenges and responsibilities in implementing its plan over time. While there is not a single set of rules regarding stewardship, several key elements have emerged in stewardship forums and discussions among citizens and City staff over the past several years.

The following “elements” are offered as a framework for neighborhood planning groups as they organize for plan implementation. They are meant to provide guidance to neighborhood plan groups as they work to initiate and maintain a successful implementation effort. Taken together these elements allow neighborhood plan stewardship groups to fulfill their overall mission of monitoring and facilitating the overall implementation of the neighborhood plan.

## **The Elements**

- 1. Create a clear organization for coordinating the work of the neighborhood.**
- 2. Organize to implement specific plan recommendations.**
- 3. Conduct ongoing outreach and communications with the community.**
- 4. Be accountable to the interests of the neighborhood as a whole.**
- 5. Build partnerships with City government, community organizations and groups from other neighborhoods.**
- 6. Pursue opportunities for ongoing learning and skill development.**
- 7. Sustain the neighborhood’s history.**

# 1. CREATE A CLEAR ORGANIZATION TO COORDINATE THE WORK OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

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In order to function effectively, a stewardship group must form an organization—be it formal or loosely-structured—that will provide overall coordination and facilitate communication within the community and between the community and the City. Below are a few basic suggestions to consider in working together with various stakeholders in the neighborhood.

- ✓ ***Make meetings accessible.*** Consider establishing a consistent meeting time and place that is well advertised and accessible to everyone in the community.
- ✓ ***Communicate the intent of the stewardship group.*** Create a mission statement, decide how decisions will be made, and clarify the roles and expectations of stewardship group participants.
- ✓ ***Seek out and welcome new participants.*** New members helps to keep groups fresh and reflective of the evolving character and needs of the community.
- ✓ ***Provide opportunities for individuals to contribute to the work; acknowledge their contributions.***
- ✓ ***Maintain a friendly and open culture.*** Honor differences and respect for one another, and encourage humor. Provide opportunities for social time and building community.

## Examples from the Community

- In Crown Hill/Ballard, the stewardship group is the Ballard District Council, which has a specific stewardship committee. This committee in turn has several topic-specific sub-committeess. Reports are featured at District Council meetings and stewardship committee meetings open to the public. Individual subcommittees also hold meetings.
- The Pike/Pine neighborhood's steering committee holds open meetings. The meetings take place at the same time and location each month, and announcements are placed in local publications to encourage public attendance. At the meeting, specific projects are discussed along with business pertaining to the overall implementation of the neighborhood plan. Work from four separate committees is reported at the monthly meeting.

## 2. ORGANIZE TO IMPLEMENT SPECIFIC PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS.

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Stewardship groups must monitor the overall progress of the neighborhood while taking action on key projects. However, each plan contains many more activities than can be carried-out solely by those most active in the stewardship organization. Thus it is critical to look for ways other interested stakeholders can take part in activities that accomplish the goals of the plan.

- ✓ **Meet with leaders of community organizations** in order to strategize how to accomplish specific plan projects and delegate specific roles.
- ✓ **Delegate projects to committees or to organizations that may or may not be formally represented in the stewardship organization.** These include Community Development Corporations, school-related organizations, Business Improvement Areas, church groups, and social service agencies.
- ✓ **Find ways to “plug” individuals and groups into plan projects, goals, and actions.** People participate and stay involved if they have a role in accomplishing projects.
- ✓ **Meet with the Neighborhood Development Manager and City department staff to develop specific implementation strategies.**

### Examples from the Community

- Central Area neighborhood activists have identified existing groups in the community who are in a position to implement aspects of the neighborhood plan. For example, the Coyote Junior High School staff and students have taken responsibility for implementing key activities relating to the arts in the neighborhood plan. The Central Area Development Association Land Use Committee has taken responsibility for leading the Jackson Street Multimodal project while the Greater Madison Community Council focuses on gathering community input and monitoring the City’s plans for the Arboretum. The Madrona Park Steering Committee works to implement parts of the open space plan.

### 3. Conduct ongoing outreach and communications with the community.

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Successful plan stewardship is based on keeping people informed and getting people involved—whether that involvement is limited to attending a community event, or is as committed as serving on an ongoing action team. Implementing a good communications and outreach strategy is a key to invigorating the work of the stewardship group and getting more done. Effective outreach also helps make the group more representative of the community while building support within the neighborhood and the City for specific projects.

Here are some cheap and easy ideas for outreach:

- ✓ **Create a rotating display at the local library.**
- ✓ **Provide incentives for members to invite their friends.**
- ✓ **Post flyers at community kiosks and area businesses.**
- ✓ **Create and distribute email newsletters.**
- ✓ **Prominently locate signs at plan projects in the community.**
- ✓ **Take advantage of free announcements in community newspapers.**
- ✓ **Invite reporters to your events and provide interesting information about key projects.**

#### Examples from the Community

- The Central Area Neighborhood Plan Stewardship Team has delegated communications work to a subcommittee of their Executive body. This committee publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that is sent to a list of people. The list is continually being updated and expanded. They also maintain a website that reports on the progress of neighborhood plan implementation.
- Friends of the Junction in West Seattle promotes their work by prominently locating signs at key projects in the community.



## 4. BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE INTERESTS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD AS A WHOLE.

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Neighborhood planning groups conducted extensive outreach during the neighborhood plan process. If plan stewardship groups are to be effective, they must continue some of these efforts in order to both understand and reflect the interests of the broader neighborhood on an ongoing basis.

This advice requires a solid communications strategy, good organization, and opportunities for people throughout the neighborhood to comment-back to the stewardship group on plan activities. Groups that wish to reflect the interests of the community must develop a decision-making process that is viewed as being fair and open to the diversity of people.

- ✓ **Regularly report back to the broader neighborhood** on accomplishments through newsletters, printed and spoken updates to community organizations (an annual “report card”), or by posting information on community kiosks or local publications.
- ✓ **Provide a way for people to give input** regarding how implementation of the plan is going. Encourage feedback through surveys attached to newsletters and distributed at meetings and community locations or post a suggestion box at the library and community center.
- ✓ **Develop and communicate a clear decision-making process.**
- ✓ **Keep good records** of how the stewardship group sets priorities and makes decisions, and how it addresses concerns and suggestions from citizens within the neighborhood.

### Examples from the Community

- In addition to reporting out to the community via a newsletter called *the Current*, Ballard’s committee chairs are required to maintain notebooks where they record feedback received from the community. Chairs also must report what they are doing to involve people from throughout the neighborhood in their activities.
- The District Councils administer a Sidewalk Improvements Fund. To ensure that decisions are made in the interest of the community as a whole, each applicant to the program must evaluate every other application based on objective criteria. Ranking of priority projects—and thus allocation of program funds—is a result of everyone’s feedback.

## 5. BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH CITY GOVERNMENT , COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS FROM OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS.

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Many issues identified in the planning process transcend neighborhood boundaries and require a citywide or area-wide approach. Building relationships with government and with other groups can help in leveraging more resources. Partnerships, coalitions and collaborative efforts also give neighborhoods the capacity to tackle more complex or controversial issues.

- ✓ Explore opportunities to collaborate with local organizations, businesses, developers, and other neighborhoods to implement specific projects of mutual interest.
- ✓ Identify all possible partners, including local governments, community agencies and other neighborhoods; invite other neighborhood stewardship organizations to share information about their work.
- ✓ Create coalitions with adjacent neighborhoods to address common issues and priorities.

### Examples from the Community

- West Seattle neighborhoods are working together to study and take action on transportation issues that are shared by the four neighborhood plan stewardship groups. They have also engaged the City, Metro and other government agencies in helping find solutions to problems identified throughout the neighborhoods' planning processes.
- The South Lake Union neighborhood proposed a park within their planning area. An advisory committee was established that consisted of area businesses, residents, City officials, and neighborhood planning activists to develop plans for the park.

## 6. PURSUE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONGOING LEARNING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT.

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Both the neighborhood planning process and recent surveys by the Planning Commission revealed that citizen volunteers are interested in gaining skills and new knowledge to increase their effectiveness. This includes knowledge and skills relating to leadership, project management, outreach, and communications. Certainly, skill development is one way to increase the effectiveness of the neighborhood plan stewardship group.

- ✓ Take advantage of the Leadership Training program being developed by the City's Department of Neighborhoods.
- ✓ Invite other neighborhood plan stewards to share information on lessons they have learned.
- ✓ Schedule speakers or free workshops through educational institutions or professional organizations on topics that directly pertain to the neighborhood plan.
- ✓ Encourage neighbors to attend City-sponsored workshops on topics such as raising funds and organizing.

## 7. SUSTAIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S HISTORY.

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One of the biggest challenges for any organization is teaching and reinforcing the unique history of that particular group. When the people who have been intimately involved in neighborhood planning and implementation move on to other things, the community often loses the knowledge of why and how an action or decision was taken, or why certain things have become priorities. This is also important in terms of supporting the *legitimacy and credibility* of the group's decisions and actions. All organizations need to develop and maintain ways to document their planning process and keep the focus on the vision, goals and agreed-upon priorities.

Here are some of the mechanisms used to retain a group's memory:

- ✓ **Create a mission statement that reflects the plan's priorities.**
- ✓ **Develop a flyer that highlights the neighborhood plan's key elements and priorities; develop and distribute annual reports on plan implementation.**
- ✓ **Create display boards for community events.**
- ✓ **Organize commemorative events.**
- ✓ **Meet with elected officials periodically to highlight accomplishments and advocate for other priorities that have yet to be accomplished.**
- ✓ **Draw on people who have previously been involved in the work of the neighborhood to serve as inspirational speakers.**

### Examples from the Community

- Weaving Wallingford, Wallingford's stewardship group, maintains a record of the planning process at their community office and has published a "plan at a glance" summary of the plan.

# Resources

## *The Stewardship Toolkit*

The following printed resources have been distributed to each neighborhood in a packet entitled *the Stewardship Toolkit*. They are also available through your Neighborhood Development Manager.

### 1. **Maps & Contacts**

sector area maps and phone numbers of key city personnel associated with neighborhood plan implementation

### 2. **Tracking Neighborhood Plan Implementation**

information from the Department of Neighborhood's website and database

### 3. **City Funding Sources for Neighborhood Projects**

information about how to apply for City funds

### 4. **Examples of Neighborhood Projects Utilizing City Funding Resources**

examples of neighborhood projects that have been funded through Department of Neighborhood programs

### 5. **Tools and Resources**

a list of printed materials and information available through the Department of Neighborhoods, including a list of community meetings spaces

